

REWARDS OF GRACE

CONFERRED ON

CHRIST'S FAITHFUL PEOPLE:

A SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DECEASE OF THE

REV. OLIVER HART, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT HOPEWELL, IN THE
STATE OF NEW-JERSEY:

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE, DECEMBER 31, 1795, IN
THE SEVENTY-THIRD YEAR OF HIS AGE.

PREACHED AT THE

BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH-CAROLINA,

FEBRUARY 7, 1796.

By RICHARD FURMAN, A. M.
PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

*They that turn many to Righteousness, shall shine as the Stars
for ever and ever.*

DANIEL.



CHARLESTON:

PRINTED BY J. M'IVER, No. 47, BAY.

MDCCXCVI.

REWARDS OF GRACE

CHRISTIAN FAITHFULNESS

AND SINCERITY

IN THE SERVICE OF GOD

AND HIS KINGDOM

OF HEAVEN

AND OF THE EARTH

IN THE PRESENT AGE

AND IN THE FUTURE



THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

TO THE
MOURNING WIDOW, AND BEREAVED CHILDREN

OF THE DECEASED

REVEREND OLIVER HART;

AS WELL AS TO THE CHURCHES HE SERVED IN
THE GOSPEL;

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
AS A TOKEN OF RESPECT FOR THE MEMORY OF
THE *DEAD*, AND OF AFFECTION TO THE
LIVING, IS HUMBLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR

FRIEND AND SERVANT,

IN THE GOSPEL,

RICHARD FURMAN.

FEBRUARY 15, 1796.

TO THE
MOURNING WIDOW AND ORPHAN CHILDREN

OF THE DECEASED

REVEREND OLIVER HART

AS WELL AS TO THE CHURCHES HE SERVED IN

THE COUNTY OF

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE



AS A TOKEN OF RESPECT FOR THE MEMORY OF

THE DEAD AND OF AFFECTION TO THE

LIVING IS NUMERALLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR

THINK AND BEHAVE

IN THE COUNTY OF

RICHARD BURMAN

PRINTED IN 1850

A S E R M O N, &c.

MATTHEW XXV. 21.

WELL DONE, THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!
THOU HAST BEEN FAITHFUL OVER A FEW THINGS; I
WILL MAKE THEE RULER OVER MANY THINGS: ENTER
THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD.

HOW awful are the awards of eternity! How interesting to the creature who feels himself accountable for his conduct, and an expectant of eternal bliss or woe!

The mind of man, roused by the dictates of reason and conscience, naturally looks forward to future scenes; and, by the very constitution of its nature, becomes susceptible of the deepest impressions of joy, or terror, from the prospect.

But under the faint light of natural religion and philosophy, we discern the great realities of the spiritual and eternal world, in a very imperfect manner:—clouds of darkness obscure many of its most interesting scenes—doubt and conjecture hold us in a state of awful suspense.—It is to revelation we are indebted for a proper acquaintance with a future state, and the transactions of judgment; as well as for the rich displays of grace, through a Redeemer. In the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, where life and immortality are brought to light, these truths are set before us in the most striking colours, and with the strongest evidence: while, every motive which ought to influence the mind of a rational and immortal creature, in the pursuits of religion and
virtue;

virtue; whether arising from our obligation to God, the desire of our own happiness, the exercise of benevolence, or the acquirement of true honour, is brought into view, and powerfully enforced.

Among the various passages in holy writ which are directed to these purposes, the words of the text before us and its connections, which were delivered by our Lord, in one of his last discourses with his disciples before his passion, hold a place highly interesting and distinguished.

Our blessed Redeemer had come up to Jerusalem to attend the pascal solemnity; and, also, to fulfil that sacred, typical institution, in the sacrifice of himself. Two days before the feast commenced (as appears by what is subjoined to his discourse, in the beginning of the 26th chapter) on his leaving the temple, he had dropped some awful sentences, respecting the destruction of that magnificent building, and of the city in which it had long stood as the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts. Jesus then retired, as he was wont, to the Mount of Olives; and while sitting there, probably in full view of Jerusalem and of the temple, the disciples, whose minds appear to have been deeply impressed with the words their Lord had spoken, came and requested that he would tell them when these things should be; and what would be the sign of his coming, and of the end of the world. To this two-fold inquiry, our Lord gives an answer in the *preceding chapter*, united with various warnings and exhortations; all clothed in the most solemn and descriptive language. Continuing his discourse in *this chapter*, he illustrates the subject of the general judgment, and of things intimately connected with it, by the parable of the ten virgins, and by this of the talents, of which our text is a part; and then dropping similitudes, concludes his excellent discourse in a plain account of the appearing and transactions of the great Judge; and of the final states of men as awarded by his righteous, irrevocable sentence.

This

This parable of the talents is very similar to that of the ten pounds mentioned by St. Luke, being founded on the same principles; but is really a different parable: The one was spoken on a former occasion, at Jericho; this, just at the close of our Lord's ministry, on the Mount of Olives. It should seem, that our Saviour intended, by these parables, to impress the minds of his disciples with a deep sense of their dependence on him, as he is their *Great Lord and Master*; of their special obligation to improve, in his absence, or during the present life, the various gifts of his bounty, whether of a more common or special nature (which seem to be designed by the talents, said to be given according to every man's several ability;) and of his justice and goodness: Which he will display when he shall return to judge the world, by punishing the inexcusable ingratitude, neglect and disobedience, of those who continue in a state of sin; and by conferring rewards of grace on his truly pious and faithful people.

To the last mentioned gracious intention, our text is particularly adapted: In which an approved character is described; the approbation of the righteous Judge is declared, and an honor and blessing conferred by him on his faithful servant.

Wishing to improve the mournful dispensation of divine Providence which we this day recognize, in the death of that venerable and excellent man of God, who so many years faithfully, usefully and honorably presided in this church; our thoughts have naturally been turned to these words; on which we propose to discourse in the following order:

FIRST. Consider holiness and fidelity as they exist, and are necessarily connected, in the real disciple of Christ, or a truly good man.

SECONDLY. Take a view of that faithfulness which is more especially displayed by a gospel minister, in discharge of his sacred trust.

THIRDLY.

THIRDLY. Bestow some thoughts on the honor and happiness, which will be conferred by Christ, on his faithful servants, at his appearing.

LASTLY. Conclude, with an improvement of the subject, suited to the occasion.

First. We are to consider the existence and necessary connection of holiness and fidelity, in the real disciple of Jesus Christ.—It is not uncommon to call those servants or persons *good*, who are faithful in the discharge of any trust reposed in them; but as the epithets *good* and *faithful* are both used in this instance by our Lord, it is natural to think, that he intended by them things really different. For, though faithfulness to a trust, is, in its general nature, virtuous, and included in the general description of moral goodness, or holiness; yet, men are often found faithful from interest, when they are not so from virtue, in things which are in themselves laudable; at other times, from the same motive, or from inclination, in things which are neither laudable, nor, in general, beneficial: And for the execution of which, the basest of men, or even infernal spirits, would be more proper as agents, than the children of wisdom and of God.

But such is the service of Christ, that no unsanctified mind *will*, or *can*, be faithful in the performance of it. The servants, therefore, which he approves are good, or holy: They are influenced by pure motives, governed by the principles of truth and goodness, and act with a single eye to the glory of God, as the great end of all their actions and pursuits.

Our Lord, when exposing the superstitious veneration of the Jews for their rabbies, and correcting the mistake of one who had formed wrong ideas of *his true character*, has shewn us, that the character of *good*, in an exalted and peculiar sense of the word, is to be applied to God alone. But in a less exalted sense, it is applicable to both angels and holy men. The latter are described in the scriptures of truth as the subjects of divine grace, in whom
a renovating

a renovating change is produced, by the influence of God's holy spirit: And, in whom the fear of God, divine love, justice, benevolence, sincerity, humility, faith, patience, fortitude, and the whole train of christian virtues, or graces, are abiding and operative principles. In the holy temper produced by this assemblage of graces, consists that goodness which forms their distinguished characteristic, intended to be explained under this head.

Faithfulness, as it is connected with this character, and applied to good men in general, consists in the conscientious and regular discharge of the various duties incumbent on us: whether natural, civil, moral or religious. All which, when rightly performed, are done in conformity to the will, and in subjection to the government of that righteous and dread sovereign, whose kingdom ruleth over all, and whose throne is established eternally in the Heavens.

In the performance of this service, all those graces which have been enumerated are called into exercise; and in connection with them, a sacred regard, yea zeal, for the divine glory and the interests of Jehovah's kingdom, is eminently conspicuous. This principle our Lord declares to be a great criterion of faithfulness; both as it engages the mind to the cause of God, and stands opposed to all the selfish interests and passions, which govern the hearts of wicked men whether they pretend to religion or not. "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.*"

By this fidelity we are also to understand a serious regard to those solemn engagements a person comes under, when he embraces the gospel and makes a voluntary surrender of himself to God: When in holy baptism, he dedicates himself to the service of the adoreable Trinity, renouncing all his sins; and when at the Lord's

B

table,

* John, vii. 18.

table, or on other solemn occasions, he renews his engagements.

The necessary connection of this holiness and fidelity is, therefore, abundantly evident; for, without sanctified affections no acceptable service can be rendered to God; nay, without them, God will not be religiously regarded by us, in the very acts which are done professedly for his glory; but by the exercise of pure affections, the common actions of life, as well as the more important, are consecrated to this noble end.

Without the influence of a holy faith, love, and their attendant graces, we will neither realize, nor suitably regard, the great truths of religion; its duties, especially its *self-denying duties*, will be rendered irksome; and temptations to unfaithfulness readily find access to our hearts. Among these, that horrid temptation which represents God as a hard master, and which proved so fatal to the unfaithful servant mentioned in this parable, is not the least to be feared.

For a farther illustration of this truth, we may add, that as the various graces which form a holy temper are necessary to render us faithful in the service of God; so a faithful attendance to the duties of religion, is the proper mean of exemplifying the reality and excellence of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. "He that keepeth my commandments," saith the blessed Jesus, "he it is that loveth me.*" We proceed,

Secondly, To take a more particular view of that faithfulness which is manifested by a gospel minister in the discharge of his sacred trust.

This appears, 1st. In his rejecting all base and unworthy motives, when engaging in the service: Such as wealth, worldly honor, or party-interest: That he may perform it to the glory of God, and from a pure principle of love to him and to the souls of men.

2d. By his entering on the great work, and regularly pursuing it, as the important business of his life; causing
all

* John xiv. 21.

all other business and interests to submit to this, that he may please him who hath called him to be a spiritual soldier, and fulfil the ministry he hath received of the Lord.

3d. In duly attending to his studies, the improvement of his mental powers and other abilities with which he has been furnished to the work; and in acquiring such farther qualifications as are placed within his reach, by which his usefulness may be increased. The first of these is expressly directed to in the epistles to Timothy;* and the latter is inculcated at large, in this parable of the talents.

4th. By his retaining and cherishing a tender, lively sense, of that duty and gratitude he owes to his divine Lord. By entering fully into the gospel spirit, loving its sacred truths, and feeling a holy zeal for the accomplishment of its great purposes: Like the seraphic Elijah, who was “very jealous for the Lord of Hosts;†” and as the evangelic Isaiah, who “for Zion’s sake would not hold his peace, nor rest, until her righteousness should go forth as brightness and her salvation as a lamp that burneth.‡”

5th. In his regularly executing the different branches of his pastoral office—faithfully preaching the truths of the gospel, even the whole counsel of God, as far as he understands it; whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear—clearly distinguishing between the law and gospel, and between the characters of men as saints or sinners, and giving to each their portion in due season—administering those warnings, counsels and reproofs, which are designed to bring sinners to repentance; and publishing the invitations, promises and declarations of grace, for the consolation of penitent and believing souls; thereby feeding the sheep and lambs of Christ’s flock, in giving private instruction, admonition and reproof, on suitable occasions, in keeping the ordinances as delivered by Christ and his apostles; and administering them in purity, to the persons who are declared in the scriptures to be the proper subjects—And, finally, by enforcing

* 1st Tim. iv. 13, &c. 2d Tim. iv. 1, &c.

† 1st Kings, xix. 10. ‡ Isaiah, lxii. 1.

enforcing the discipline of the church, in a regular, impartial manner.

6th. In patiently enduring the labors and sufferings he may be subjected to, in his course of duty; and courageously encountering the dangers, discouragements or revilings of opposition.

7th. By carefully improving time and opportunity for doing good; making the whole of his life, as much as possible, useful to the great purposes of religion. By rejecting the flattering temptations of the world and sin; exhibiting to all men an example of unaffected piety, benevolence, humbleness and purity; and by persevering therein to the end. We proceed,

Thirdly. To consider the honor and happiness, which Christ will bestow on his faithful servants, at his appearing.

These blessings are strongly expressed in the text; and the gracious words will be addressed, as well to him that shall be found faithful in the improvement of two talents, as to the other, who shall exhibit a like faithfulness in the improvement of five. Each character is designed to express the state of thousands, who will be accepted at the great day of retribution.

We begin with a view of the happiness they shall receive. This will consist: In the approbation of their Lord; the rewards of grace conferred on them; and, the high enjoyments on which they will enter.

The first, clearly expressed by the lips of Christ himself, and declaring the acceptance of their persons, as well as the approbation of their services, will afford the most full and lasting satisfaction. Here, by faith, the children of God gain a pleasing persuasion, that they are interested in the divine favor; and, while walking in the light of Jehovah's countenance, that persuasion grows up to a good degree of assurance. But, in their dark hours, they have many distressing doubts. Even when fully assured that the blessings of salvation are secure to all those who are true believers, or subjects of grace; yet,

from

from their knowledge of the deceitfulness of the human heart, of the presumptuous hope indulged by many, and of their own manifold imperfections, they feel the impressions of fear; lest, at last, they themselves should be found wanting. But the gracious approving sentence, from the mouth of their Judge and Savior, at the great day, will eternally banish every fear from their breasts. With this blessing will be connected a compleat deliverance from the accusations of Satan and the censure of wicked men. The misconstructions and jealousies of their friends and brethren, which are sometimes incurred in this imperfect state, will be also for ever removed.

But the favor and bounty of their Lord will be farther manifested, in conferring on them rewards of grace. I say, *rewards of grace*; for, every idea of meriting from the hand of God is excluded, *even by right reason, as well as by the gospel*. Our goodness reacheth not to God. He is not benefited by any of our services. And, even our best religious performances are mixed with so many and great imperfections, that we need forgiveness for the best we do. It is by grace we are interested in the righteousness that justifies, that perfect righteousness of the mediator, Jesus; and while rendering our imperfect services, we are daily brought under obligations greater than we can ever discharge, by the superabounding goodness of God, displayed in the blessings of providence and grace which we receive. However, therefore, our gracious Judge may approve the honest and grateful endeavours of his imperfect servants to please and honor him, and confer on them distinguishing marks of his favor, all must be attributed to his royal bounty and *unmerited munificence*.

These rewards of grace are expressed in the scriptures by the most grand and pleasing figures. In the parable before us, they are represented by their Lord's continuing to the approved servants the talents originally given them, with those gained by their improvement; and by putting them in possession of much greater blessings. "I will

will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." However great, therefore, the blessings may be considered, which are represented by ten talents (a sum exceeding fifty thousand pounds sterling money*,) they will be vastly exceeded by the blessings of glory conferred in the eternal state. A pleasing intimation, also, is here given, that grace received, and services performed for God, *in time*, will be followed by blessed consequences, which will remain with the righteous, and augment their happiness, *to eternity*.

But St. Paul assures us farther, that a *crown of righteousness* will be conferred by the Redeemer, on *all those* who love his appearing. And the blessed Jesus, while on earth, informed his disciples, that he would appoint unto them a *kingdom*, as his Father had appointed unto him: And he now promises to all who overcome, that they shall sit down with *him* in *his throne*; as he has overcome, and is set down with *his Father* in *his throne*. To which also he will invite them, saying, Come! ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.—In a word, *eternal life* he will bestow: *Immortal existence*, with all that makes life *life*: "Fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore."

They, therefore, shall enter on the highest enjoyments, even into the joy of their Lord; shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb; eat the hidden manna; pluck the fruit of the tree of life; and, drink of the living water which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and of the new wine which is in the kingdom of God. They shall be invested with the white garments of righteousness and the palm of victory; receive the precious gem, with a new name written therein; and wear the crown of glory.

Of

* The best antiquarians inform us, that the talent of gold, most probably intended here, amounts to £.5,475; consequently, ten talents to £.54,750.

Of these divine enjoyments we can speak, and indeed, *think* but very imperfectly. They will, however, be such as are best suited to the capacities of man's rational and immortal nature, when brought to its highest improvement in knowledge and virtue: Such as will not only give satisfaction, but produce the most refined, triumphant and lasting joy; and will consist principally in the clear knowledge and immediate enjoyment of God. Their communion with Christ, their exalted Redeemer, will be uninterrupted, and in his joy they will partake: Having on earth experienced fellowship with him, in his humiliation and sufferings, they will now share in his triumph and glory. Nor can we forget, on this occasion, the social happiness and sweet intercourse represented as subsisting between glorified spirits, when dwelling in the mansions Christ has prepared for them: They shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the Prophets and Apostles in the kingdom of God; and being made like to the Angels of God in heaven, they will be fit companions for those first-born Sons of Light, and be ready to unite with them in all their sacred employments of worship and of love.

That those who have been happily united here, in the gospel church, by the ties of christian love, pure friendship and relative connection, will have a happy meeting in heaven, and joyfully recount what they have experienced in a deliverance from all their earthly trials and sorrows, and in the consummation of their hopes and wishes; cannot, it is presumed, be rationally doubted.

The honor Christ will confer on his faithful servants, in the great day, will appear, in his taking notice of their particular and private actions; even those which will then be forgotten by themselves. His owning them from the throne before assembled worlds, to the unspeakable joy of all good beings, and to the confusion of their wicked enemies. His conferring on them degrees of glory, in proportion to their zeal and diligence on earth; placing them at his right hand; giving them to share
in

in the honors of the judgment; and welcoming them to the mansions of glory, in the strongest terms of commendation and of love*: Saying, " Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord." " Come, ye blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

IMPROVEMENT.

IN the application and improvement of this subject, we are first led to contemplate our accountableness to God for life, with all its blessings and opportunities; and especially for the dispensation and privileges of the gospel. Every man has received a gift of importance, *even a talent*†, from the hand of God, to be improved for his glory; and can never disengage himself from his obligations to execute the sacred trust. The requisition is made on principles of the most perfect justice and equity. Are we not the creatures of God, and indebted to him for every blessing and advantage we enjoy, as well as for our existence? And has he not a *sovereign right* to demand our services? To some he has given much indeed: Capacious understanding, discerning judgment, lively wit and fancy, persuasive eloquence, and the refinements of science; united to bodily health and vigor, abundant wealth, honorable or happy connections, stations of eminence, and extensive influence among mankind. Let us remember, *these* were not given that we might wax wanton in enjoyment; indulge inclination at pleasure, and live to ourselves; but to afford us opportunities of doing good, and of being abundantly useful. The enjoyment of gospel privileges being among the first
of

* The original *eu*, or *euge*, rendered Well done, is not only a term of approbation, but laudatory and congratulatory. See Hedericus, Parkhurst, Schrevelius and Leigh; also, *Poli Sinopsis Criticorum*, Doddridge, &c.

† See the note on the value of a talent. Many persons not being acquainted with the value of money among the ancients, or not duly attending to the circumstance, have been led to consider the one talent as only a trifling sum; but it appears, on examination, to be a considerable trust for a servant.

of blessings, O! let us take care, that the neglect of them and of the great salvation does not bring on us the heaviest condemnation.

Let us, secondly, take notice, that whatever blasphemers may say, or the doubts of weak, sceptical minds suggest, respecting a failure of the promise of the Savior's coming, the appointed time will bring the awful event. Our absent Lord has withdrawn his bodily presence from our world for a time, and retired to his courts beyond the skies: There, in the unapproachable recess of light he dwells, while the day of long sufferance and grace, connected with man's probationary state, is continued. But, when the gospel has made its progress through the world, and the schemes of providence and grace are compleat, the Great Lord of Angels and of men will appear in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, attended by the innumerable multitude of his mighty Angels, and will ascend the throne of judgement.—Sun! thy glories will be darkened at the sight.—Thou shalt be shaken to thy centre, stable earth!—Thy face, O Nature! shall be changed; and the vast expanse of the heavens, with all its glories, be wrapped together like a scroll: And with an astonishing, rushing noise, pass away like the vapor which is dissipated in the air. At that awful moment will the trumpet sound, and the voice of God, no less powerful than that which called nature into existence, summon the nations, quick and dead, to the decisive bar. Here, from the records of Heaven, will the secrets of all hearts be revealed, and the hidden things of darkness brought to light; our true character will be discovered, and our actions tried. How natural to exclaim, on this occasion, with the Apostle: “Seeing we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!”*

Thirdly, we learn hence the great importance of improving life well, and of being prepared to die. What is life detached from eternity? How low, how trivial, are all its concerns and pursuits, where our final state is

C

forgot!

* 2d Peter, iii. 11.

forgot! Like a cypher, or a fleeting shadow! Nay worse, they terminate in disappointment, guilt and ruin. "Be not deceived,—whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."* Life then is the seed-time for eternity; and he that sows in righteousness, though in tears, shall reap with joy.

The improvement of life, therefore, is of no less importance, than to escape from hell, and fly to heaven. But can death be less important?—Death, to which we are liable every moment; and which frequently arrives at the moment least expected! Death, which puts, at once, a period to all the business, enjoyments and pursuits of life; and terminates the state of probation to individuals, as judgement does to the world at large. "It is appointed to all men once to die, and after that the Judgement."† Happy the man, who is ready to lay him down in his "clay, cold bed," in the well-founded and blessed hope of a happy resurrection. But, O! how awful is the change to him, who has never seriously thought of approaching judgement; who has shamefully neglected the interest of his soul, and by whom the service of God is left undone; who, in a moment, perhaps, is snatched away from his possessions and enjoyments, just as his heart is dilating with the fond hope of earthly happiness, and while he is congratulating himself in the prospect of much goods laid up for many years, and a plenary indulgence in all the pleasures his appetites can crave.—At once, the gay delusions vanish: He sinks under the burden of his sins, and horrors seize his guilty soul. This leads us,

Fourthly, To take up a lamentation over the thousands of careless, thoughtless and profane sinners, who never felt the divine ambition to approve themselves to God in a course of holy obedience, but are either hiding their talent in the earth, or provoking their *Dread Sovereign* and

* Gal. vi. 7. 8.

† Heb. ix. 27.

and *Righteous Judge* to jealousy, by their daring impiety. How will they be able to stand before God in judgment, or answer for all their neglects and abuse of mercies? "O! why is a price put into the hands of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?"*—Heaven invites; God thunders out of Zion; eternity displays its awful and glorious scenes; but he remains unmoved! Religion is esteemed by him the employment of knaves and fools: Its refined pleasures, holy exercises and heavenly prospects, for *him* have no charms. The house of God is avoided; the sabbath is a burden, or a day of wordly business and pleasure; and the gospel is despised. But, for the scenes of dissipation and trifling amusement; for the pursuits of vain ambition; the applause of mortals; and the acquisition of wealth—for *these*, he has *inclination* and *attention*!—for *these* he has *time*!—with *these* he is *enraptured*!——But, we are led,

Fifthly, To contemplate, with peculiar pleasure, the blessed prospects the righteous have in view. Already have they received grace; but they are expectants of glory. Though placed, for the present, in a state of trial, and often assailed with temptation, they are pressing onward to perfection, and will soon enter into their rest. Their reconciled God, who has accepted them through the righteousness and intercession of his son, looks on them with a propitious eye, approves their services offered by grateful, obedient hearts, however feeble and imperfect; and, in the gospel revelation, holds up the crown to their view: But, in the last great day, he will own them, and approve their conduct before the assembled multitudes of heaven and earth—yea, he will welcome them to the joy of their Lord, and introduce them into the paradise of God.

This glorious discovery of future blessedness, so congenial to the noblest hopes and wishes of the human heart, should stimulate us to the most vigorous and generous pursuits in religion; that we may render the
best

* Proverbs, xvii. 16.

best services we can to our God and Redeemer, and make our short lives as useful as possible to mankind. The best services we can render, amount comparatively to but little; the rewards of grace will be immense. The time of our service and trial is short; the rest and glory to be received, will be eternal. We discern hence,

Sixthly, The necessity of strictly examining ourselves, that we may not indulge a presumptuous hope, nor suffer at last the fearful disappointment of those who will be disowned by Christ, in the day of his appearing: "Not every one that saith unto him Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of his father, who is in heaven."* Are we of the latter character? Is religion, indeed, the great concern of our lives? Are our eyes singly directed to the glory of God, as our grand object? And are we sweetly constrained by divine love, to exert all our powers in his cause, and for the interests of his kingdom? Were we called to stand for trial at the bar of an earthly judge, on a cause of life and death, what anxiety would we feel! what care to be in readiness, and to obtain acquittal! How much more should our minds be affected, when we know that we are to appear before the Judge of all the earth, whose eyes are as pure flames, piercing into the secret recesses of the soul, discerning every thought and every action, and who will decide on the *everlasting states* of men? Let conscience therefore now speak faithfully in our breasts, assisted by the light, and armed, as it is, by the authority of God's word. Let us look with the utmost care into the true state of our souls, nor suffer that deception, respecting our character, which self-love, and the various delusions of the world and sin, so frequently produce. We are furnished,

Seventhly, With an excellent argument, from this source of instruction, against that immoderate sorrow which is apt to arise when we lose the company of
Christ's

* Matt. vii. 21.

Christ's faithful servants; who, by death, are called away before us from this earthly state. But why should we lament? Have they not finished their work, proved their faithfulness, and entered into their rest? where their works follow them by blessed consequences, and serve as evidences to their love and zeal.

Being thus brought to the subject we had principally in view, waving other uses for the present, I ~~haste~~ make some observations respecting the life and character of that truly eminent, and amiable minister of Jesus Christ, who has lately, as we have every reason to believe, made a happy exchange of the scenes of trial and duty, for those of rest and glory.

The Rev. Mr. Oliver Hart, was born of reputable parents, in the state of Pennsylvania, July the 5th, 1723. From several accounts there is reason to conclude, that he received a religious education; but, that his attention to religion, and conversion to God, were at an early period, is very certain: for his serious profession of Christ, and submission to baptism, took place on the 3d of August, 1741, when he was but little more than eighteen years old. At that time, the power of religion was greatly displayed in various parts of this continent, under the ministry of that eminent servant of Christ, Rev. George Whitefield, of the Episcopal Church; of Rev. Messrs. the Tennents, Edwards, and their associates, of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches; and of the Rev. Abel Morgan, and others, of the Baptist Church. Several of these, Mr. Hart, at this time, used to hear; and has since professed to have received much benefit from their preaching, particularly from Mr. Whitefield's.

Five years after making his public profession of religion, on the 20th of December, 1746, he was licensed to preach, by the Baptist Church at Southampton, in Pennsylvania; and on the 10th of October, 1749, was ordained to the great work of the gospel ministry.

The call for ministers in the southern parts of this continent, being at that time great, and *this* church being destitute,

destitute, he was induced, immediately after his ordination, to set out for this city, where he arrived early in November, on the very day the Rev. and excellent Mr. Chanler, pastor of the church at Ashley River, then the only ordained minister of the Baptist denomination in this part of the country, and who had preached part of his time in this church, as a supply, was buried. While the church was destitute, applications had been made both to Europe and the Northern States, for a suitable minister; and one, who had been described as such, was actually expected; but the unexpected coming of Mr. Hart, was considered as directed by a special providence, and so great was the satisfaction of the church, on hearing him, that he was immediately invited to take the pastoral charge of them; with which he was accordingly invested on the 16th of February following.

For thirty years from this period he executed the office of pastor in this church, as a faithful, evangelic minister of Christ, passing through a variety of scenes, both of joy and depression; but exhibiting, at all times, an uprightness and dignity, both of temper and conduct, becoming his religious and sacred character. His life was exemplary, and his usefulness conspicuous. But on the approach of the British fleet and army, to which Charleston was surrendered in 1780, being justly apprehensive of the consequences which resulted from the siege, and desiring to preserve his *political liberty*, with which he found his *religious* intimately connected, he retired to the Northern states. There the attention of the respectable Baptist Church at Hopewell, in the state of New-Jersey, was soon attracted toward him, and in consequence of a pressing invitation from them, he became their pastor on the 16th of December the same year, and served them in that capacity, the last fifteen years of his valuable life.

For some years past, the infirmities of age, and several severe attacks of different diseases, had greatly reduced his bodily strength, and disqualified him for the
constant

constant performance of public duties; and on the 31st of December, the last day of the year which has just expired, he surrendered his soul into the hands of his God and Redeemer.

The circumstances attending this mournful event, we have not yet received; but have every reason to believe, they have been correspondent to the life and profession he had supported.——

To those of you, my dear hearers, who enjoyed the honor and happiness of an acquaintance with the venerable deceased, an account of his character is unnecessary; it shone conspicuously in your view. But to the younger part of my audience, and to those friends who have come lately among us, it may afford useful information.

In his person he was somewhat tall, well proportioned, and of a graceful appearance; of an active, vigorous constitution, before it had been impaired by close application to his studies, and by his abundant labours; his countenance was open and manly, his voice clear, harmonious and commanding; the powers of his mind were strong and capacious, and enriched by a fund of useful knowledge; his taste was elegant and refined. Though he had not enjoyed the advantages of a collegiate education, nor indeed much assistance from any personal instruction, such was his application, that by private study, he obtained a considerable acquaintance with classical learning, and explored the fields of science; so that in the year 1769, the college of Rhode-Island, in honor to his literary merit, conferred on him the degree of master in the liberal arts.

But as a christian and divine, his character was most conspicuous; no person who heard his pious, experimental discourses, or his affectionate, fervent addresses to God in prayer; who beheld the zeal and constancy he manifested in the public exercises of religion, or the disinterestedness, humility, benevolence, charity, devotion, and equanimity of temper he discovered on all occasions in the private walks of life; could, for a moment,

moment, doubt of his being not only *truly*, but *eminently* religious. He possessed in a large measure the moral and social virtues, and had a mind formed for friendship. In all his relative connexions, as husband, father, brother, master, he acted with the greatest propriety; and was endeared to those who were connected with him in the tender ties.

From a part of his diary, now in my possession, it appears that he took more than ordinary pains to walk humbly and faithfully with God; to live under impressions of the love of Christ, to walk in the light of the divine presence, and to improve all his time and opportunities to the noblest purposes of religion and virtue.

In his religious principles, he was a fixed Calvinist, and a consistent, liberal Baptist. The doctrines of *free, efficacious grace*, were precious to him; Christ Jesus, and him crucified, in the perfection of his righteousness, the merit of his death, the prevalence of his intercession, and efficacy of his grace, was the foundation of his hope, the source of his joy, and the delightful theme of his preaching.

His sermons were peculiarly serious, containing a happy assemblage of doctrinal and practical truths, set in an engaging light, and enforced with convincing arguments. For the discussion of doctrinal truths, he was more especially eminent, to which also he was prepared by an intimate acquaintance with the sacred scriptures, and an extensive reading of the most valuable, both ancient and modern authors. His eloquence, at least in the middle stages of life, was not of the most popular kind, but perspicuous, manly and flowing, such as afforded pleasure to persons of true taste, and edification to the serious hearer.

With these various qualifications for usefulness, he possessed an ardent desire to be as useful as possible, which cannot be better represented than in his own words, as recorded in the diary before referred to, and which comprehends a part of his life, when the power
of

of divine grace was eminently displayed in this church. The article here selected, was written just before that work of grace began, and exemplifies in him the pious christian, as well as the faithful divine.

“ Monday, August the 5th, 1754. I do this morning feel myself oppressed under a sense of my barrenness : Alas! what do I for God? I am indeed employed in his vineyard, but I fear to little purpose. I feel a want of the life and power of religion in my *own heart* : This causes such a languor in all my duties to God : This makes me so poor an improver of time. Alas! I am frequently on my bed when I ought to be on my knees—to my shame. Sometimes the sun appears in the horizon, and begins his daily course, before I have paid my tribute of praise to God ; and perhaps, while I am indulging myself in inactive slumbers. Oh! wretched stupidity! Oh! that, for time to come, I may be more active for God! I would this morning resolve, before thee, O! God, and in thy name and strength, to devote myself more unreservedly to thy service than I have hitherto done : I would resolve to be a better improver of my time than I have heretofore been : To rise earlier in the morning, to be sooner with thee in secret devotion, and Oh, that I may be more devout therein! I would be more engaged in my studies. Grant, O, Lord! that I may improve more by them! And when I go abroad, enable me better to improve my visits ; that I may always leave a savour of divine things behind me. When I go to thy house to speak for thee, may I always go full fraught with things divine, and be enabled faithfully and feelingly to dispense the word of life. I would begin and end every day with thee : Teach me to study thy glory in all I do : And wilt thou be with me also in the night watches ; teach me to meditate of thee on my bed ; may my sleep be sanctified to me, that I may thereby be fitted to thy service, nor ever desire more than answers this important end. Thus teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom.”

D

These

These virtuous resolutions and pious breathings of soul, were seconded by becoming exertions, both of a public and private nature, in his own congregation; and by correspondent labours in churches abroad; nor were they without success, many owned him as their father in the gospel: Among these are two distinguished and useful ministers, who survive him, and shine as diffusive lights in the church.* These were not only awakened under his preaching, but introduced by him also into a course of study for the ministry.

The formation of a society in this city, to assist pious young men in obtaining education for the public services of the church, and which has been of use to several, originated with him; and he was a prime mover in that plan for the association of churches, by which so many of our churches are very happily united, at the present day. To him also, in conjunction with his beloved and amiable friends, now I trust with God, Rev. Francis Pelot and Mr. David Williams, is that valuable work of public utility, the system of church discipline, to be ascribed. His printed sermons have contributed to the general interest of religion, and his extensive regular correspondence, has been the means of conveying rational pleasure, and religious improvement to many.

To all which may be added, his usefulness as a citizen of America. Prompt in his judgement, ardent in his love of liberty, and rationally jealous for the rights of his country; he took an early and decided part in those measures which led our patriots to successful opposition against the encroachments of arbitrary power; and brought us to possess all the blessings of our happy independence. Yet he did not mix politics with the gospel, nor desert the duties of his station to pursue them; but attending to each in its proper place, he gave weight to
his

* Rev. Dr. Stillman, of Boston, whose praise is in all the churches; and Rev. Mr. Botsford, among ourselves.—To these may be added a third, Mr. Ewin, who succeeds Mr. Hart, as pastor of the church at Hopewell, April 8th, 1796.

his political sentiments, by the propriety and uprightness of his conduct; and the influence of it was felt by many.

But this amiable and excellent man has now finished his course, and is gone to render an account of his stewardship to his Lord and Master, to whom he knew he was accountable for his various gifts and graces, and whom to serve and honor, was his delightful employ. On such an occasion, we are ready to exclaim with Elisha, when he beheld the ascending prophet, "My Father! My Father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Our beloved friend is removed from the world: And all those among whom he once went preaching the gospel of Christ, shall, in the flesh, see his face no more. May heaven support his pious, weeping widow, so greatly bereaved! And may indulgent providence and grace, provide for the youth who is left as the son of his old age!

I sympathize with you, my much respected and christian friends, who, in the death of this excellent man of God, mourn the loss of a father, or near relative! The loss of such a father demands a tear on *your* part, but on *his*, you have reason to rejoice. Your venerable parent had lived the full term allotted to man on earth; he had exhibited an example of tried worth; had obtained large experience of the mercy and love of God; and, being rich in good works, has come to the end of his days as a shock of corn fully ripe, and ready for the garner above. Dry up then your tears, imitate his piety and virtues; aid, by your best endeavors, that sacred cause of God and religion, for which he was so long the public and faithful advocate among us; and prepare to meet him in that happy land, "where seraphs gather immortality from life's fair tree, fast by the throne of God."

The same considerations may be addressed to the body of this church, but especially to those who knew our worthy friend, and lived under his ministry. You know, my brethren, that he was the pious, faithful man here described,

described; to you I can appeal for the truth of the character which has been given at large; and it is an exalted pleasure to find it so correspondent to that exhibited in the text: To that which will meet with the approbation of Christ, and on which he will confer the highest honors at the general judgement.

A new evidence is hereby added to the truth and power of religion, by his thus persevering through a long life of trial and of labours, and in finishing his course in a manner so becoming the gospel. Let it have its proper influence on your minds, for the confirmation of your faith and hope. Remember the godly example he exhibited while he went out and came in before you, in the pastoral office; and while he broke to you the bread of life: And let the doctrines and counsels he delivered in your hearing, sink deep into your hearts; for by them, he being dead, yet speaketh.

Are any who have been used to hear the calls and warnings of the gospel from his lips, still impenitent and careless? O! let me intreat them, and all of this character, seriously to consider in this their day, the things which concern their peace, lest they be eternally hid from their eyes. O! consider them before death strikes his fatal blow! Before God's awful trumpet sounds, and calls you to his bar!

Finally, let us all aspire to that holiness, faithfulness, and excellency of character, which God approves; that as humble believers in his Son, and dependents on his grace; as well as servants, to whom his bounty has confided an important trust; we may feel the force of our obligations, and exert every power in his sacred cause.

And when the great day of final retribution shall arrive—amid the falling stars—the melting elements and dissolving worlds—may we stand unmoved!—Meet the approbation of our Judge, and enter into the joy of our Lord! May God of his infinite mercy add a blessing to his word, and to his great name be everlasting praise, Amen!

F I N I S.



ne
an
ni-
ne
ne

nd
a
his
ve
on
le
u,
he
he
s;

gs
O!
to
eir
O!
re

fs,
at
his
as
of
ed

ng
pa-
ed!
rd,
.